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ABSTRACT

A survey determining how widespread the policy of prisoner furloughs has become and how well the programs which have been implemented are operated was conducted. A questionnaire regarding home furlough policies was distributed to the directors of the departments of corrections of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The questionnaire requested a copy of the law and/or regulations under which home furlough programs were authorized (if applicable) and posed nine questions. These questions include: (1) Do you have a policy of sending adult male inmates home for emergencies? (2) Do you have adult male inmate home furloughs for other than emergency purposes? (3) Do you have a law for adult male inmate home furloughs? and (4) What are the criteria under which adult male inmates are selected for home furlough? Findings include: (1) The granting of emergency leave is a widespread practice in American corrections; (2) The home furlough program is a relatively new addition to American correctional practices; and (3) The criteria under which the various agencies grant furloughs typically stipulate that persons considered for the program be of minimum custody status, have either served a fixed amount of their sentence or be within some fixed time of release and be approved by a review committee which considers the applicant's institutional record, home situation, and past history. Further research on home furlough programs is suggested. (CK)

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# A SURVEY OF THE HOME FURLOUGH POLICIES OF AMERICAN CORRECTIONAL AGENCIES[1]

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Morris and Hawkins (1970) contend that the preservation and strengthening of the inmates' family ties, supplemented by the preservation and creation of other linkages with the community, afford corrections one of the better tools for rehabilitation. Within this context, the family of the released offender (excluding those families which are likely to contribute to antisocial behavior) and existent social agencies have the potential of providing him much-needed assistance and support as he makes the difficult transition from institutional to community life. In the United States, the most common means of maintaining the family ties of incarcerated public offenders is visitation. A survey of 74 state and local institutions (Zemans & Cavan, 1958) indicated that visits between a male inmate and his spouse most frequently were of two hours' duration, twice monthly. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) recommended that graduated release and furlough programs should be expanded, integrated with institutional treatment, and coordinated with the community treatment services which are now inaccessible to the vast majority of inmates by the very nature of the confinement process.

Other countries have led the way in developing and implementing effective means of maintaining family ties and of affording the inmate the opportunity to avail himself of the services provided by community agencies. One such means, the home furlough program (Cavan & Zemans, 1958), permits unsupervised leaves of absence for selected inmates. Of the nine European countries reported as authorizing such absences for other than emergency purposes, Sweden's policies appear to be the most lenient. Virtually all inmates are granted at least one furlough during the course of a year; most are granted two or more. Home furloughs are considered a normal part of a sentence and apply to all classes of inmates. Each year approximately 15% of the furloughs granted involve a violation of trust. Statistics show that although a new crime is occasionally committed, most of these violations are of a minor nature, such as becoming intoxicated or failure to return to the institution at the specified time. Cavan and Zemans indicate that Swedish criminologists are undisturbed by these violations inasmuch as they represent only a small proportion of the inmates on furlough and they believe the practice is beneficial for the majority.

The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice reported that in this country, Michigan and Mississippi, two states which are now operating

extensive home furlough programs, have experienced less than a 1% violation of trust. Officials of these states maintain that furloughs, in addition to helping to prevent the deterioration of family ties, also allow offenders an opportunity to test out whatever newly learned skills and insights they may have acquired through counseling experiences. Since 1944, Mississippi has permitted inmates with three years of good behavior and rated as trustworthy to go home for a period of 10 days. The data reported by Zemans and Cavan show that from 1944 to 1956, 3,204 prisoners were released for home furloughs under the program. Of this number, 15 failed to return, 12 of whom were accounted for, and three of whom were still at large. Hopper (1969), updating Zemans and Cavan's data, reported that each year between December 1 and March 1, approximately 300 inmates were granted home furloughs of 10 days' duration. During 1967, only two of the 219 inmates granted furloughs did not return voluntarily. The prison administration in Mississippi believes the program is a success; in fact, they say it is a great morale builder and goes a long way towards preserving family ties.

In addition to the two states discussed above, the Federal Bureau of Prisons is now experimenting with unescorted furloughs for selected inmates under authority of the Prisoner Rehabilitation Act of 1965. Under this act, an extension of confinement limits may be granted to permit visiting a dying relative, attending the funeral of a relative, obtaining medical services not otherwise available, contacting prospective employers, or for any other compelling reason consistent with the public interest. Carpenter (1969) reported that as of midsummer 1966, of the 1,400 federal inmates who had been given benefit of the various provisions under the act, only about 5% of the men failed to return at the stipulated time either from work (under the work-release provision) or from a furlough. The Federal Bureau of Prisons today continues to use and develop its home-furlough policy as well as its other community programs.

Although the data presented above indicate that home furlough programs have encountered some degree of acceptance in American corrections, no recent information concerning the scope of such programs, nor the success they have encountered, is readily available. It would appear that concerned individuals, in evaluating the potential of such programs, would benefit from a brief survey determining how widespread the policy has become in recent years and how well the programs which have been implemented are operating. Such a survey has been conducted, and a report of the results follows.

## METHOD AND PROCEDURE

### Sample

A questionnaire regarding home furlough policies was distributed to the directors of the departments of corrections of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. All 52 agencies responded.

### Description of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire requested a copy of the law and/or regulations under which home furlough programs were authorized (if applicable) and posed the following nine questions:

1. Do you have a policy of sending adult male inmates home for emergencies?
2. Do you have adult male inmate home furloughs for other than emergency purposes?
3. Do you have a law for adult male inmate home furloughs?

If you do have home furloughs for other than emergency purposes:

4. What are the criteria under which adult male inmates are selected for home furlough?
5. How long has the home furlough program operated in your state?
6. What is the allotted time period for a home furlough?
7. How may adult male inmates have been allowed to use this privilege since the program started?
8. How many adult male inmates have failed to return to the institution in the allotted time period?
9. Are you able to explain why some adult male inmates fail to return to the institution?

## RESULTS

Findings concerning the emergency leave policies for adult male offenders are in general accord with the data reported by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice and, as such, confirm that the granting of emergency leave is a widespread practice in American corrections. Of the 52 correctional agencies surveyed, 45 reported that such programs were in operation; 5 (Delaware, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, and Wyoming) indicated that emergency leave was not granted; 2 (Hawaii and Missouri) failed to respond to the question.

Twenty-five agencies reported unsupervised home furlough programs in operation as of January 1, 1971. Of these, 20 are conducted under legislative provisions and 5 in accord with departmental regulations (see Table 1). In addition, 4 agencies (Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, and Rhode Island) indicated the existence of enabling legislation but that no program had yet been implemented.

The home furlough program is a relatively new addition to American correctional practices. With only three exceptions, these programs have all been instituted within the past five years (see Table 2). Only Arkansas and Mississippi have been conducting formalized home furlough programs for more than 15 years, with Arkansas reporting parenthetically that the state has allowed informal home furloughs for "...as long as anyone can remember."

The criteria under which the various agencies grant home furloughs are difficult to categorize, but these criteria typically stipulate that persons considered for the program be of minimum custody status, have either served a fixed amount of their sentence or be within some fixed time of release, and be approved by a review committee which considers the applicants' institutional record, home situation, and past history. Exclusions commonly include those who are serving life sentences or who have committed notorious or heinous crimes, crimes of violence or sex offenses. A small number of agencies report that home furloughs are granted only to inmates participating in a work- or study-release program.

Eighteen agencies reported sufficient data to determine rates of abscondence from home furlough. However, the manner in which this information was reported varied from agency to agency. Although most agencies indicated the data provided were the most recent available and, as such, reflected that which had transpired during either 1968 or 1969, other agencies supplied information for previous years or composite data for a number of years. A small number of agencies indicated the information they provided was either a "best approximation" or reflected rates of abscondence from the instigation of their program. Although these data are the most complete and recent now available, the inconsistencies with which they were reported dictate that any conclusions drawn relating rates of abscondence to various aspects of home furlough programs should be viewed as tentative in nature and open to reevaluation and confirmation.

The reported rates of abscondence from home furlough were uniformly low, ranging from a low of zero in nine instances to a high of .080 (eight per 100) in one instance.

The rank-order correlation between the number of furloughs granted by each agency and the rate of abscondence is .70 ($r' = .70$, $df = 16$, $p < .05$), indicating that those agencies which allow the greatest number of furloughs are also those agencies which tend to experience the highest percentage of abscondences.

The maximum number of days of release permitted under the various home furlough programs ranges from 1 to 30. The rank-order correlation between the allowed maximum duration of furlough and abscondence rate is .58 ($r' = .58$, $df = 16$, $p < .05$), and between maximum allowed duration of furlough and abscondence rate weighted by the number of furloughs granted is .59 ($r' = .59$, $df = 16$, $p < .05$), indicating that the higher abscondence rates are associated with the programs which allow the longer duration (see Table 3).

Ten agencies responded to the question concerning the reasons underlying abscondence. Of these, nine respondants indicated that they believed alcohol to be the major factor precipitating abscondence, and listed as a second reason either family problems or problems with members of the opposite sex. Only one agency reported that the commission of a felony contributed significantly to rates of abscondence, while another indicated that a large number of their reported abscondences were of a "technical" nature and resulted from the inmates' inattention to time schedules.

## DISCUSSION

The number of agencies allowing unsupervised home furloughs for adult male inmates has increased drastically within the past five years, and now more than half the states either have home furlough programs in operation or have enabling legislation for such programs. The success of these programs, as indexed by reported abscondence, is remarkably high, with more than half the agencies which supplied such data reporting rates lower than 1 per 100. Although there do exist significant correlations between rates of abscondence and both the absolute number of home furloughs granted and the maximum allowed duration of home furlough, it should be pointed out that even in these extremes the highest mean abscondence rate does not exceed 2 per 100, and that the highest single rate reported was only 8 per 100. Undoubtedly, those agencies granting a limited number of furloughs can be more selective of those who are granted furloughs, and the furloughs of shorter duration logically provide less opportunity for becoming involved in situations which underlie abscondence. However, the rates of abscondence from those programs which

grant the larger number of furloughs or provide longer duration furloughs are sufficiently low to suggest that the most lenient practices are warranted in home furlough policies.

The home furlough offers correctional administrators an excellent medium through which to guide the behavior of inmates as they again cope with the stresses of the real world. In addition, the furlough seemingly maximizes an inmate's chances of rehabilitation by preserving family ties and allowing him to take advantage of the services available from the various community agencies. Finally, the home furlough provides the administrator with a much more valid measure of an inmate's readiness for release than the limited observations made within the artificial setting of the closed institution.

In making the home furlough survey a number of questions were raised which suggest further research on the feasibility of the program. However, the data presented herein indicate that home furloughs can be made an integral part of American corrections without major calamity and, indeed, have the potential of advancing the rehabilitative effort.

Some of the research questions which were suggested include:

1. What is the effect of the family situation on the goals of the home furlough program, and along what dimensions should the family situation be assessed?
2. Should there be a lower limit on the amount of time or the proportion of a sentence an offender serves before he is allowed to go on home furlough?
3. Should home furloughs be limited only to certain classes of offenders, eliminating notorious or heinous criminals, drug addicts, and certain sex criminals?
4. How do the men use their time on home furloughs?
5. What is the cost/effectiveness of a home furlough program?

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## Footnotes

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[2]The authors express their appreciation to Dr. John M. McKee, Executive Director of the Rehabilitation Research Foundation, for his guidance and support.

[3]Subsequent to the compilation of these data, the superintendent of the District of Columbia's Lorton Correctional Complex suspended the inmate home furlough program after its legality and purpose were challenged by the District's Criminal Justice Coordinating Board (Inmate furlough program halted at Lorton Complex, Police Pressure Seen as Partial Cause. **Corrections Digest**, 1971).

## Tables

1. Agencies reporting home furlough programs in operation and authority under which conducted.

2. Distribution of the number of years home furlough has been in operation by number of agencies.

3. Weighted mean abscondence rates by maximum allowed duration of home furlough.

**Table 1**

| | Authorization | |
|---|---|---|
| | Legislative Provisions | Departmental Regulations |
| Agencies reporting home furlough programs in operation as of January 1, 1971 | | |
| Alaska | X | |
| Arkansas | | X |
| California | X | |
| Colorado | X | |
| Connecticut | X | |
| District of Columbia[3] | X | |
| Federal Bureau | X | |
| Florida | X | |
| Hawaii | X | |
| Idaho | X | |
| Iowa | X | |
| Louisiana | | X |
| Maine | X | |
| Maryland | X | |
| Michigan | | X |
| Minnesota | X | |
| Mississippi | | X |
| Nebraska | X | |
| New Mexico | X | |
| North Carolina | X | |
| North Dakota | X | |
| Oregon | X | |
| South Carolina | X | |
| Utah | X | |
| Vermont | X | |

Table 2

| | | Number of Agencies |
|---|---|---|
| Number of years home furlough program has been in operation as of January 1, 1971 | Less than 1 year | 7 |
| | 1 to 5 years | 15 |
| | 5 to 10 years | 1 |
| | 10 to 15 years | 0 |
| | More than 15 years | 2 |

Table 3

| | | Agencies Reporting Home Furlough Program in Operation | Agencies Reporting Abscondence Rates | Weighted Mean Abscondence Rates |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maximum number of days of release permissible under provisions of home furlough program | 1 | 2 | 2 | .000 |
| | 2 | 8 | 4 | .008 |
| | 3 | 4 | 4 | .008 |
| | 4 | 1 | 1 | .000 |
| | 5 | 2 | 1 | .004 |
| | 10 | 4 | 4 | .018 |
| | 30 | 4 | 2 | .012 |

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